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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001945

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: MULKI VISIT WARMS JORDANIAN-ISRAELI TIES; CALLS AGAIN FOR SYRIA WITHDRAWAL

REF: A. AMMAN 909

[1](#)B. AMMAN 1854

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) During a two-day visit to Israel and the West Bank March 5-6, Jordanian Foreign Minister al-Mulki announced that Jordan would "intensify its mediating role" between Israelis and Palestinians. Mulki said the Palestinians agreed to accept the dispatch of a Jordanian-trained Palestinian force to bolster security in the West Bank. He told press that his Israeli counterpart would visit Jordan in the coming weeks, and that King Abdullah may consider visiting Israel. Jordanian prisoners in Israel topped Mulki's agenda, and one contact suggests a release could come as early as next week. Mulki also reiterated during his trip Jordan's demand that Syria withdraw from Lebanon. End Summary.

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JORDANIAN-ISRAELI TIES THAWING

[1](#)2. (U) Jordanian Foreign Minister Hani al-Mulki visited Israel and the West Bank March 5-6 in the first visit to Israel of a Jordanian foreign minister in nearly four years. After meeting Abu Mazen in Ramallah, Mulki traveled to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem for talks with Israeli leaders, including Israeli PM Sharon, Deputy PM Peres, Defense Minister Mufaz, and FM Shalom. Mulki told reporters after meeting Sharon that Jordan would step up its efforts to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and host meetings in the coming weeks with Shalom and Palestinian officials. King Abdullah also may consider visiting Israel, according to Mulki, but he offered no timetable. "We have been saying for a long time that we want peace for future generations. Today we say we want peace for us first," he told reporters. "We have to stop the terror right away, we have to make peace right away," he said, adding that peace between Israel and the Palestinians would quickly lead to peace for Israel with other Arab states. "Everybody has to know that peace pays." He said that during meetings with Israeli officials, he planned to focus on how "to bring the peace treaty and the agreements between Jordan and Israel back into action."

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IN RAMALLAH, TALKS CENTER ON SECURITY

[1](#)3. (U) After the meeting with Abu Mazen in Ramallah on March 5, Mulki told reporters that their talks focused on security cooperation. He said that the Palestinians welcomed the dispatch of a 1,000-member Jordanian-trained security force, known as the Badr Brigade (ref A), to secure areas in the West Bank once Israel withdraws its troops. "It is a Palestinian force and it is well trained," Mulki told a press conference. "The Palestinian Authority would like it to come back and we would like to facilitate that." (Note: Israeli press reported that Sharon did not respond favorably to the dispatch of the Badr Brigade to the West Bank, but that he would permit PA security personnel to be trained in Jordan. End Note.)

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PRISONER RELEASE IN THE WORKS?

[1](#)4. (C) Highlighting the thorn in the GOJ's side, Mulki emphasized that the release of more than 20 Jordanian prisoners from Israeli jails is a top priority. "There is no bargaining over this issue," he told reporters. "You have to understand they (the prisoners) are important to us and we want to see them released next month or during this month," he added. "I don't think this issue should be responsible for derailing our relations." No resolution was announced publicly, but MP Abul Rahim Malhas (Amman-3rd District) told poloff on March 7 that Mulki told him the previous evening: "I will release the prisoners on March 14." Malhas said he was taken aback by the Minister's use of the word "I," noting that the Israelis (not Mulki) would release the prisoners. According to Malhas, Mulki did not say how many prisoners

would be released, but it was clear that Mulki saw even a partial prisoner release as a personal victory. Public statements by the GOJ also suggested a release is imminent. Spokesperson Asma Khader told reporters on March 7 that a group of prisoners would be released "soon," and that the two sides were talking about the arrangements.

15. (C) Prior to Mulki's trip, oppositionists were using the prisoner issue to focus mounting pressure on the GOJ. The Islamic Action Front hosted a press conference at its Amman headquarters on March 1 to express solidarity with prisoners in Israel who had started a hunger strike. Relatives called on King Abdullah to intervene personally to secure their release, and they criticized the current and former governments for failing to act on this issue. The spokesperson for the Families of the Prisoners Committee, Saleh al-Ajlouni, highlighted alleged promises by former FM Muasher not to return an ambassador to Israel until the prisoners were released, and suggested that the families would not squander Hizballah's offer to help secure their release.

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STRONG WORDS FOR SYRIA  
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16. (C) Mulki took the opportunity of his visit to repeat his call on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. "Implementation of the (UN Security Council) resolution (1559) should result in a stronger Lebanon and a Lebanon that is undivided," he declared on March 5. While applauding Jordan's support for Lebanese sovereignty, some Jordanians criticized the manner in which the message was delivered. Embassy contact and businessman Wahib Shair, for example, criticized Mulki for making the comment during a visit to Israel. He told poloff that while a Syrian withdrawal may be in Jordan's interest, saying so in that particular venue made it appear as if Mulki was speaking on the Israelis' behalf. He also ridiculed Mulki's demeanor during press appearances, saying the perceived "chumminess" with the Israelis he displayed was inappropriate given the current state in relations. Dr. Husni Shiyab, a professor at al-Isra University, expressed disbelief to poloff at Mulki's approach, criticizing him for calling for the implementation of 1559 while in Israel, but not even mentioning resolutions 338 and 242, which call for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. Malhas, in contrast, sought to defend Mulki, a personal friend, noting that his casual, informal demeanor is a personal trait and that no more should be read into it.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Many Jordanians have come to view the Jordanian-Israeli relationship through the prism of the prisoner issue. The prisoners' families, backed by the opposition, keep the issue alive; weekly newspapers regularly display glossy photos of and features on the prisoners, particularly the four accused of killing Israelis before the peace treaty. The GOJ realizes that the average Jordanian perceives little benefit in the Jordanian-Israeli relationship, and the opposition effectively exploits this. Charge will follow up this issue with Mulki and report septel.

18. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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